

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Fish and Wildlife Service****Notice of Availability of the Technical/ Agency Draft Recovery Plan for Arabis perstellata (Braun's Rockcress) for Review and Comment**

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of document availability and public comment period.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces the availability for public review of the technical/agency draft recovery plan for Braun's rockcress. Braun's rockcress (*Arabis perstellata*) is a perennial herb that grows in calcareous mesophytic and sub-xeric forests in north-central Kentucky and north-central Tennessee. The Service solicits review and comment from the public on this draft plan.

DATES: Comments on the draft recovery plan must be received on or before May 20, 1997 to receive consideration by the Service.

ADDRESSES: Persons wishing to review the draft recovery plan may obtain a copy by contacting the Field Supervisor, Asheville Field Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 160 Zillico Street, Asheville, North Carolina 28801 (Telephone 704/258-3939). Written comments and materials regarding the plan should be addressed to the State Supervisor at the above address. Comments and materials received are available on request for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the above address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. J. Allen Ratzlaff at the address and telephone number (Ext. 229) shown above.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Background**

Restoring endangered or threatened animals or plants to the point where they are again secure, self-sustaining members of their ecosystems is a primary goal of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's endangered species program. To help guide the recovery effort, the Service is working to prepare recovery plans for most of the listed species native to the United States. Recovery plans describe actions considered necessary for conservation of the species, establish criteria for recognizing the recovery levels for downlisting or delisting them, and estimate time and cost for implementing the recovery measures needed.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Act), as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), requires the development of recovery plans for listed species unless such a plan would not promote the conservation of a particular species. Section 4(f) of the Act, as amended in 1988, requires that a public notice and an opportunity for public review and comment be provided during recovery plan development. The Service will consider all information presented during a public comment period prior to approval of each new or revised recovery plan. The Service and other Federal agencies will also take these comments into account in the course of implementing approved recovery plans.

Based upon available information concerning the range, biology, and threats to its continued survival, it is not yet possible to determine if or when full recovery of Braun's rockcress is possible. Accordingly, this draft recovery plan outlines a mechanism that provides for the protection and maintenance of all known population with emphasis on determining autecological factors necessary to manage the species. Braun's rockcress was officially listed as an endangered species on January 3, 1995, primarily because of its extremely limited range, loss of habitat, competition from invasive exotic plants, and other detrimental impacts that result from site disturbance. Comments and information provided during this review will be used in preparing the final recovery plan.

Public Comments Solicited

The Service solicits written comments on the recovery plan described. All comments received by the date specified above will be considered prior to approval of the plan.

Authority

The authority for this action is Section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1533(f).

Dated: March 12, 1997.

Nora A. Murdock,

Acting State Supervisor.

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Availability of an Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of the availability of a Final Environmental Assessment on development of a United States/Russia bilateral agreement for the conservation

of a shared polar bear population; request for comments.

SUMMARY: This Notice makes available to the public the Final Environmental Assessment for the Conservation of Polar Bears in the Chukchi/Bering seas. The Chukchi/Bering seas and a portion of the Eastern Siberian Seal stock of polar bears, hereafter referred to as the Alaska-Chukotka population, is shared between Russia and the United States. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the agency responsible for management and conservation of polar bears (*Ursus maritimus*) in the United States, proposes to develop a conservation agreement for the Chukchi/Bering seas stock of polar bears as part of the Service's natural resource stewardship responsibilities in the management and conservation of this international resource.

In 1973, Canada, Denmark (on behalf of Greenland), Norway, Russia, and the United States signed the international Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears (1973 Agreement). Each country is obligated to develop conservation programs to comply with the 1973 Agreement. The United States relies largely on the Marine Mammal Protection Act to comply with the terms of the 1973 Agreement. Also, in 1988 a local Native-to-Native subsistence users agreement was developed between the Inupiat of the North Slope Borough in the United States and the Inuvialuit of the Northwest Territories, Canada, to provide further protection for the shared Beaufort Sea polar bear population. No such agreement exists for the shared Alaska-Chukotka population. Section 113(d) of the 1994 Amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act state: "the Secretary, acting through the Secretary of State and in consultation with the Marine Mammal Commission and the State of Alaska shall consult with the appropriate officials of the Russian Federation on the development and implementation of enhanced cooperative research and management programs for the conservation of polar bears in Alaska and Russia." The Service, in consultation with the Department of State, the Marine Mammal Commission, and the State of Alaska proposes to enter into a government-to-government bilateral conservation agreement with the Russian Federation. As a companion action the Natives from Alaska and Chukotka, Russia, plan to enter into a Native-to-Native implementation agreement for the Alaska-Chukotka population.

The Final EA describes three alternatives for entering into